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AUTHOR Lewis, Angela
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ABSTRACT

This study sought to evaluate the implementation of a program to foster the inclusion of differently abled students into a regular elementary school classroom. The report is based on interviews with eight regular and two special education teachers, as well as the school principal, along with classroom materials and information on inclusion provided by the school administration. An analysis of the interviews found that regular and special education teachers were comfortable in planning together, making joint decisions, and discussing activities that supported the students, but that they felt there was a lack of administrative support, lack of team planning, and a lack of team tolerance and cooperation. Specific recommendations for improving the inclusion process are included. Contains nine references. (MDM)

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The Inclusion of Differently Abled Students in the Regular Classroom

by
Angela Lewis
Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education
The University of Montevallo
Station 6377
Montevallo Alabama 35115

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association
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Introduction

The need for clear guidelines has lead to animosity toward the philosophy of inclusion. Teachers fear full inclusion because they are required to do a difficult task without sufficient training and support. Administrators fear the loss of funds because differently abled students are not pulled out for special classes. Parents of regular and differently abled students fear a lack of teacher attention to their children placed in inclusion classrooms (Rogers, 1993, p. 4.).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation of the inclusion of differently abled students into a regular public school classroom culture. Culture in this study was defined from an anthropological point of view. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) define culture as:

> everything having to do with human behavior and belief
>
> (pp. 15).

Differently abled students in this context were defined as students with physical or ability challenges served in the regular public school classroom. The foreshadowed questions were:

1. How were differently abled students included in the class culture?
2. How was the classroom teacher prepared?
3. What was the impact of the inclusion of differently abled students on the school culture including special educators, school administrators, etc.
4. What were the problems (if any) in implementing the inclusion of differently able students.

The Significance of the Study

The school administration was interested in implementing an inclusion

program that would benefit all children. Parts of the previous year's program was working successful. Yet, many aspects of the implementation of this program could be improved.

The literature shows, in general teachers feel ill equipped to handle the various special needs in their classroom. Many regular teachers tend to feel thrown into frustrating situations by school systems rushing to include differently abled children in regular classes. (Teaching Exceptional Children, 1993b). There is an overall lack of cultural relevancy in many regular public school classrooms that would support the inclusion of differently abled students.

There is much debate concerning who should be included and how this inclusion should take place. Inclusion of all differently abled children may not be practical for some students. Yet, providing full inclusion for many children may enhance the educational community and society in general.

Literature Review

Inclusion

Inclusion "as an educational philosophy is based on the belief that all students are entitled to fully participate in their school community" (Friend & Cook, 1993, p. 53). Inclusion also pertains to students from different cultures whose first language is not English and students at risk for failure because of alcohol or drug abuse as well as students with special needs (Friend, & Cook, 1993).

Full inclusion resulted from the Regular Education Initiative coined by Madeline Will, past Under Secretary of Rehabilitation and Special Education. The Regular Education Initiative examined the merger of special and regular education with the merger of the funding sources for each.

Rogers (1993) described inclusion as "the belief that instructional

practices and technological supports are presently available to accommodate all students in the schools and classrooms they would otherwise attend if not disabled. Proponents of full inclusion believe that special education services should generally be delivered to differently abled students "in the form of training and technical assistance to 'regular' classroom teachers" (Rogers, 1993, p. 2).

The full inclusion of differently abled students has been successful in many areas. Schattman & Benay (1992) believed that if "a school is to be successful, it must provide equity and excellence for all children. Education in a democratic society requires no less" (p. 12). Successful "full inclusion classes" appear to have some commonalities in that they "embrace instructional practices that provide challenging learning environments to children with very diverse learning characteristics" (Rogers, 1993, p. 4). Included in these characteristics are peer tutoring, multiage classrooms, middle school structures, cooperative learning, and well developed school media centers (Rogers, 1993). In successful inclusion classrooms the regular teacher expects success. Students are prepared before the differently abled student arrives. School personnel provide needed support services. Special education and regular education teachers collaborate, team teach, adapt curricula and instructional methods (Teaching Exceptional Children, 1993a).

In successful situations, inclusion offers differently abled students the opportunity to fully contribute to the community. These students are exposed to talented teachers, and are given the opportunity to build and establish relationships with regular classroom peers in addition to benefiting from quality education in a normal school setting (Schattman & Benay, 1992).

Subjects

Eight regular classroom and two special education teachers were participants in this evaluation. The school's principal, the key informant provided direction and background. The elementary school was located in a rural community outside a major metropolitan city. Most of the students in the school were from multiethnic working class families.

Data Collection

Examination of Documents

1. Handouts and other "system provided information" to classroom teachers regarding inclusion.
2. Materials used in the classrooms for the education of typical and differently abled students (Patton, 1987; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Participant Observations

Various teams were observed. The observer concentrated on those cases that were considered most successful and least successful.

Interviews

The researcher conducted unstructured informal interviews with the classroom teachers and administration. Notes were taken during the interview and later expanded into field notes on the word processor. The interviews were analyzed for common themes and compared to the results of the participant observations (Patton, 1987).

Analysis of Data

An analysis of the data revealed the following categories:

I. EVIDENCE OF A COMFORTABLE TEAM

   A. Planning Together

B. Joint Decision Making

C. Activities that Support the Kids

II. EVIDENCE OF AN UNCOMFORTABLE TEAM

A. Changes made to Accommodate Inclusion

B. Lack of Team Planning

C. Lack of Knowledge of the Regular Classroom Teacher

Evidence of a Comfortable Team

Planning Together

Episode # 1: Special Education Teacher #1--Interview

During August we got together to plan out her theme units novel studies and her writing workshop. We did spelling through the units using webbing. During the year she wanted to go back to the spelling book. I agreed with the modifications. She accommodated. The classroom teacher was happy to modify.

Episode # 2: Special Education Teacher #2--Interview

We have planned together. I didn't know what to do so I modified my class. We did partner reading, I used heterogeneous groups and cooperative groups. Special Education Teacher #2 participated with the kids. She helped plan. The kids worked in whole group, small group and partner reading. We planned ahead. We set up a pattern. It was a story a week. We have learned to share the teaching. If either one of us has a thought, we just speak right up.

Joint Decision Making

Episode # 1: Special Education Teacher #1--Interview

The regular classroom teacher and I consulted continuously. She worked with regular and L.D. students. None of the kids were singled out. We worked on seating arrangements, discussed what was working and what was not working.

We shared the kids work.

Episode # 2: Special Educations #2 --Direct Observation of Regular Classroom Teacher #4.

Special Education #2 was sitting at a table, she talked out and across the room. Worked with the whole group. Walked and monitored. There was a co-teaching atmosphere apparent.

Regular Classroom teacher # 4 presents worksheet in a supportive manner. Special Education Teacher # 2 picks up on needed support automatically and monitors children in the classroom. The classroom is set up for centers.

Activities that Support the Kids

Episode # 1: Special Education Teacher #1-- Interview

The classroom teacher was happy to modify. I did backup and support for students when new concepts were introduced. I also provided adapted devices. I felt free to suggest. It was a team effort. I was responsible for the curriculum in the class. I worked with regular and L.D. students. No kids were singled out.

Episode # 2: Classroom Teacher # 3-- Direct Observation

The special education teacher felt comfortable adapting the lessons on the board that were too difficult for the students. My kid--your kids. The classroom teacher's teaching style is full group very direct.

Episode # 3 : Special Educations #2-- Direct Observation of Regular Classroom Teacher #4.

Special Education #2 was sitting at a table, she talked out and across the room. Worked with the whole group. Walked and monitored. There was a co-teaching atmosphere apparent.

Episode # 4: Special Education Teacher #2-- Interview

It helped the kids to be more sure of themselves. I see better self esteem. They just think of her as another teacher. My L.D. kids were at a high level and able to keep up.

Episode # 5: Regular Classroom Teacher # 2 --Interview

The special education teacher # 2 pulled kids out for exams.

Episode # 6 : Special Education Teacher#1-- Interview

The regular classroom teacher had a great attitude and a willingness to accommodate. Children have a hard time being pulled out because of peer pressure.

Evidence of an Uncomfortable Team

Administrative Support

Episode # 1: Regular Classroom Teacher # 2-- Interview

I believe that the severity of the kids should dictate the time schedule and these kids should get the optimal time.

There were no materials brought into the classroom.

Episode # 2: Classroom Teacher # 3-- Interview

We needed more administrative support. There were items taken from the test. The kids have to know the content of the stories. We were required to place test results on the student's records. So we have to push the kids because they have to have this knowledge base.

Episode # 3: Regular Classroom Teacher # 2--Interview

I feel inclusion has hurt these kids. I was expected to plan for these kids and I had never seen an I.E.P. I was not asked to be involved at the end of the year. I did all the evaluations.

Changes made to accommodate Inclusion

Episode # 1: Regular Classroom Teacher # 1-- Interview

I had to rearrange my schedule to accommodate the Mrs. Johns. I have never taught reading this way before.

Episode # 2: Regular Classroom Teacher # 2-- Interview

There we scheduling conflicts. I made several schedule changes. We had no planning time during the day.

Episode # 3: Special Education Teacher #2--Interview

Scheduling was a problem due to the number of classes the special education teacher was expected to serve.

Lack of Team Planning

Episode # 1: Regular Classroom Teacher # 1--Interview

The time that she could come in was my major concern. In the beginning we met every Monday. I expected her to take the lead. I asked her to bring stuff if she wanted to use it. There was a lack of planning from the resource teacher.I just planned everything, did all the copying and gave the resource teacher her work and her group. The group was mostly her children.

Episode # 2: Regular Classroom Teacher # 2-- Interview

We did no summer planning. I just planned everything, did all the copying and gave the resource teacher her work and her group. The group was mostly her children

Episode # 3: Regular Classroom Teacher # 2-- Interview

She would come in and ask me what I wanted her to do. I had all the responsibility for planning for all the children and nobody was helping me. I felt so frustrated, I don't know. I was expecting somebody to teach me to make modifications slowly with these kids.

Episode # 4: Classroom Teacher # 3 --Interview

Things would have been better if we had done more planning. We did take

turns teaching.

Episode # 5: Regular Classroom Teacher # 1--Interview

There was a lack of planning from the resource teacher. She did not offer suggestions but waited to see what I had planned for all of the children. Our meeting turned out to be my explaining everything that I was going to do. Therefore I just handed her my lesson plan book. I just planned everything, did all the copying and gave the resource teacher her work and her group.

Episode # 6: Regular Classroom Teacher # 2 --Interview

I just planned everything, did all the copying and gave the resource teacher her work and her group. The group was mostly her children

Lack of Team Tolerance and Cooperation

Episode # 1: Special Education Teacher # 2 -- Interview

The regular classroom teacher did ability grouping she came up with the activities that support what she did.

I was not comfortable changing the way she does things. My kids made progress.

Episode # 2: Special Education Teacher # 2 -- Interview

One of the biggest problems I encountered was inflexibility. Teachers were angry because they had to change their reading to the afternoon. The kids were ability grouped. One teacher said "We always go out at 2:00." Two kids who were nonreaders made no progress.

Interpretation

The strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of inclusion in this school culture were manifested in the cooperation and/or lack of cooperation and mutual planning done by both the regular classroom teachers and the special education teachers. It was evident during interviews that teachers had

major territory problems. These problems were demonstrated in remarks such as my kids/her kids. Teachers continuously discussed the need for mutual planning time and mutual respect. It was evident, some of the regular classroom teachers and the special education teachers lacked this mutual respect.

In some cases, the special education teachers were considered lazy and unprepared. The regular education teachers were viewed as inflexible and uncooperative. There were personality conflicts.

Teachers discussed the need for more administrative support. They felt inadequately prepared to accept the challenge of full inclusion. Most regular classroom teachers felt that more information should have been provided in the way of Individual Education Plan (I. E. P.) goals, general expectations and teaching strategies. Many regular classroom teachers expressed frustration with the lack of personnel support and inadequate planning time.

Recommendations from group interview with regular classroom special education teachers.

In an all day retreat, special education and regular classroom teachers were invited to make recommendations for improving the implementation of the inclusion philosophy in their school. These teachers made the following suggestions:

1. There should be a substitute for the resource teacher when she has to do testing so the regular classroom teacher will not have all the students all that day.

2. Make sure inclusion for some students does not let planning, scheduling, and help for the majority take a back seat.

3. Include as many students as possible but only those who will be as successful in the regular classroom as they would be if pulled out.

4. Cap the class size and avoid putting more in class after it is established.

5. If the child is enrolled in another kindergarten class early in the year and a need is seen for the child to be in an inclusion class, that child may be moved.

6. Regular classroom teachers should be invited to attend Individual Educational Program.

7. Teachers should work together planning lessons as well as team teaching.

8. There should be cooperative planning times for inclusion team members during the day. Library, art, music, P.E. times should coincide when possible.

9. The teaching methods of the regular classroom teacher should meet the needs of all of the children in the class.

10. Administrators should spend time in the classroom observing and giving directions.

11. Teachers should be provided with stipends to attend workshops.

12. Regular classroom teachers should be provided a substitute teacher so that they will be able to attend the Individual Education Program conferences. (This can be done with a rotating substitute.)

13. Class size should be reduced at the beginning of the year in order to allow for growth.

14. There should be increased system-wide support. There is a need for more aides and more certified teachers.

15. All decisions should be child centered.

16. The regular classroom teacher and the inclusion teacher should not leave school upset but discuss the problem with his/her teammate.

17. Administrators should listen to concerns only when both members of the team are present. Negotiations and compromises should be done three ways.

Recommendations made by the Evaluator

1. It may be helpful if resource teachers have materials to checkout in the resource room. Parent volunteers could help support resource rooms. (Tapes, Listening, reading to children, math games.) Resource teachers should used some of the time allotted for a particular class to gather and adapt materials for the inclusion students.

2. Classroom teachers should be prepared for the implementation of inclusion before the actual school year begins.

3. Planning times for the classroom teacher and the inclusion teacher must overlap during the school day to allow for weekly planning times.

4. Special Educators should be allowed (and should take full advantage of) the opportunity to fully participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of lessons.

5. The regular classroom teacher should have access to test results and I.E.P. goals for the differently abled students in her/his classroom culture.

6. Inclusion teachers can provide both indirect and direct services to higher level students.

7. It is crucial to the success of inclusion that the regular education teacher and the inclusion teacher are flexible.

9. Regular classroom teachers need strategies that support the differently abled students throughout the day.

Conclusion

The implementation of inclusion is considered a process. Experts believe that it takes at least two years for teams to work effectively together. This faculty has the desire to make inclusion a reality. They are commended for their desire to make inclusion work for the good of the child. Working with limited system-wide support, the teachers and administrators have given of their time to learn and plan to make this next school year, a better year, for all of the children in this school.

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